

Bald Knob Cross

Brooke C. Greeling

Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Collinsville

Teacher: Michael Voss

Located near the bluffs at Alto Pass, one can find the sign to Bald Knob at the end of the town.

It locates one of North America's largest Christian monuments. Being twenty-two square feet at the base, sixteen square feet on the top, one hundred eleven feet tall, and sixty-three feet across, Bald Knob Cross is one of southern Illinois' finest works of architecture. The cross is made of porcelain steel panels and is engineered to withstand winds up to one-hundred-fifty miles per hour.

The history of the Bald Knob Cross is said to be a miracle by some people. In 1936 Rev. William Lirely and postman Wayman Presley began first discussing an ideal spot for an Easter sunrise service when both agreed that Bald Knob, the tallest point around, would be the best spot. The very next year they held their first Easter service there, and, as it became an annual tradition to which more and more people showed up, Wayman Presley started to develop a new dream. In 1938 the first wooden cross had been put up on Bald Knob. By 1945 all three wooden crosses had been put on display, but Presley wanted to build a permanent cross on site as well.

By the early 1950s the land had been purchased and Presley was raising funds for the proposed cross and designing the cross. Presley encouraged individuals to pledge one hundred dollars for the fund raising, but, as he came to a widow and farmer named Myrta Clutts, he knew she could not afford the hundred dollars that she had pledged. She responded to Presley's worries by quoting how great her faith was. She also mentioned how God would help her through it to raise the money.

Soon after one of Myrta's pigs had a litter of twenty-one piglets, which was three times the average size of a litter. Some of the piglets would have died due to the mother's incapability

to suckle so many of them, but Myrta's dog, who had recently lost a litter of puppies, ended up raising five of the piglets. Once the piglets went to the market, they easily brought in the amount of money needed for Myrta's pledge.

In 1955, Wayman Presley, Myrta Clutts, and Rev. William Lirely ventured to Hollywood and appeared on a national TV show called "This is Your Life." They took pictures of the piglets and their mother, and later the show helped them bring in over one thousand dollars. Presley was so moved by the success that he decided to take a vacation, leave his job with the Post Office, and began raising pigs himself. He raised over fifteen hundred pigs and funded another thirty thousand to the cross fund.

Finally with enough money to be able to support the cross, the ground on Bald Knob was broken March 30, 1959. The cross was not finished until 1963 and a decade later a Save the Cross Committee was formed. A few years later, in 1976, the Cross of Peace Foundation was also organized.

In 1990, Wayman Presley, the founder of the cross, died at the age of ninety-three. Following his death, the Rev. Lirely also died in 1992 at the age of eighty-seven, and finally in 1994 Myrta Clutts died at the age of ninety. They are very lucky to live through their work, which at night, when illuminated, can be seen from over seven thousand five hundred square miles away. They still hold annual Easter Sunrise Services which are open to the public. [From A. McPherson, *Fifty Nature Walks in Southern Illinois*; J. Reynolds, *Pioneer History of Illinois*; R. Goldstein, L. Russell, and L. Winkeler, *Enjoy Southern Illinois*; "Bald Knob Cross," <http://www.stlcc.cc.mo.us/fp/users/jangert/baldknob/bald.html> (Sept. 12, 2003); "Bald Knob Cross in Alto Pass," <http://www.shawneeheartland.com/baldknob.html> (Sept. 12, 2003).]